

AA, Steps and Program

What They Are and What They Are Not

AA (the affectionate nickname for the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous) is something different. If you think you know what it is, it will disappoint you and you will go away looking for what you expected to find. You will miss what it is and, if you are an alcoholic of our type and moving along that doomed path, what it is may save your life.

People come to AA and try to tell themselves they already know what it is. When AA turns out to be something other than what they expected before they arrived, they miss the message and the hope, and go away disappointed.

They think AA is a church. It isn't. AA is a lousy church. We say that you have to have a power greater than yourself, which most of us call God, but we do not tell you what to believe. If you want church, go to church. That's where they do "church" right.

They think AA is therapy. AA is lousy therapy. If you want therapy, go to therapy. That's where they do therapy. Many of us have used therapy as part of their program, but AA is not therapy.

They think AA is social services. Some AAs have been known to share cigarettes, rides, or allow a newcomer to sleep on the couch, but AA is lousy social services. Go to social services for that - they do it better.

The Preamble

"Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."

The Big Book

The Big Book is the book "Alcoholics Anonymous," first published in 1939, written primarily by Bill Wilson and edited through discussion between the two AA groups (approximately 100 alcoholics) with additional input from family and various professionals. The purpose of the book was to carry the system of 12-Steps for Recovery for the hopeless condition of alcoholism. It marked the first time a system was in place that could be worked if the instructions were followed. "Do the Work and you get the Result."

The Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps are a set of principles, spiritual in nature ... Although based on the work outlined by the Oxford Group, a previous fellowship, the Steps were actually written down for the first time in 1938 during the writing of the Big Book.

The Program

The Program is the system of recovery. Like all programs it is “a set of instructions to be followed in order.” This means that jumping out of sequence does not work the Program. The Program is referred to a couple of times in the Big Book as “a design for living” that really works. It is based on the Twelve Steps, to be used as Tools in our daily life

The Fellowship

The Fellowship is the collection of individuals, groups, and service structure that allow the regular meetings to exist and allows newcomers to find those meetings. The Fellowship is where we find the experience, strength, and hope of our members, whether in a discussion meeting, from the podium at a speakers meeting, or across two cups of coffee in a late-night diner.

The Literature

The Literature refers to those pieces of “conference approved” books, pamphlets, and multi-media presentations that have gone through the process of review and revision by the fellowship through the World Service Organization. The purpose of “conference approved” literature is to ensure that the content is a result of our shared experience in Recovery – not just an opinion from one person.

Conference approved literature includes:

- **Alcoholics Anonymous** – *The Big Book*
- **Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions** – *The 12 & 12*
- **Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers** – AA History, the Akron viewpoint from Dr. Bob
- **Pass It On** – AA History, the New York viewpoint from Bill W.
- **AA Comes of Age** – AA organizational history starting with the 1955 World Service Conference.
- **Living Sober** – Daily Guide for living the AA way.
- **Came to Believe** – Exploration of 2nd and 3rd Step topics.
- **Language of the Heart** – Bill Wilson's articles from the Grapevine
- **Experience, Strength & Hope** – a collection of all of the individual stories of recovery from all four editions of the Big Book
- **Daily Reflections** – A book of reflections by AA members for AA members
- And other books from WSO, plus several dozen pamphlets addressing individual topics of interest to those in Recovery.

The Twelve Traditions

The Twelve Traditions are a series of suggested guidelines to ensure the survival of AA and the independence of the individual and groups that compose AA. They are based on our first few decades of trial and error and do not hold the power of law over members or groups. They serve as guides based on our previous experience, strength, and hope as a Fellowship.